Graduation Survey for Middlebury Seniors

Scientia et Virtus: Knowledge and Virtue

This graduation is going to be different from previous years. The administration capitalized on a lack of transparency in the speaker selection processes **to quietly take control over the messaging of our graduation.** The chosen student speaker was selected **unilaterally** by the administration, diverting from the decades-long tradition of letting students submit speeches for selection by the Senior Committee.

Similarly, the commencement speaker, Chuck Davis, was not included in the list of recommended speakers by the Honorary Degrees Committee submitted to the President's Office. This may not subvert due process, as the President's Office *does* traditionally have authority to choose the commencement speaker. However, we take extreme issue with the **lack of transparency** in this process and the college's choice of speaker for this year. Investment banker Chuck Davis does NOT represent the values of "ethical citizenship" that the college's mission statement touts. Read the Campus article about it here and take a look at the draft of his speech linked below (Davis has taken down the draft, we are working on getting screenshots attached to this form)

This is OUR graduation and the speakers are meant to represent OUR voices and OUR experiences here at Middlebury.

Further, the faculty and staff are organizing in response to benefits cuts, workforce reductions, hiring freezes, and threats of layoffs. **Many faculty, including the American Association of University Professors — an organization of professors across the nation who work to protect academic freedom — support student action during graduation.** The actions of the administration are a blatant breach of their commitments to the faculty and staff. The Vermont faculty and staff should not be forced to bear the burden of financial losses in order to balance the college budget deficit. (Note that $8.7 million of the $14.1 million deficit is attributable to a lack of enrollment at the Monterey Institute.)

Everyone is affected by these actions of the college. The choice of the administration and Board of Trustees to strategically undermine the unified demands of staff, faculty, and

students will not protect us from federal attacks. It will only cause our learning—and the value of our degrees—to suffer.

We are calling on the administration and Board of Trustees to take a different route that protects its community during this national assault on higher education rather than one that renders it increasingly vulnerable.

We, a group of seniors, would love to know how you feel about all of this.

This survey consists of 12 yes or no questions (it should take 10 minutes to complete). Your voice must be heard.

Not shared

* Indicates required question

What is your graduation year? *
Note that this survey is intended for seniors.

- 2025
- 2025.5

PLEASE READ:
This survey will not collect emails unless you put it in below. Your responses WILL REMAIN PRIVATE.
The college cannot access the results of this survey, so please still answer honestly.

If you want to hear the results of the survey and/or are interested in participating in the potential actions below, please put your email.

Email

Your answer

Petition in support of freedom of speech and the role of students in graduation.

For future graduations, do you believe that the college should **uphold** the decades-long tradition of students submitting a speech for consideration, followed by the senior committee democratically electing the student speaker from that pool of applicants? *

- ◯ Yes, I support upholding the previous process
- ◯ No, I do not support upholding the previous process
- ◯ Prefer not to respond

Do you feel that Middlebury's choice of commencement speaker, Chuck Davis, aligns with the college's mission statement as a liberal arts college that fosters ethical citizenship? *

See Davis' leaked speech draft: The Commencement Address

Did you catch the mentions of top 1% of genetics*, quotes from at least one billionaire with close ties to the Trump administration, and mistaking nepotism and white privilege for "unconditional love?"

Also the Campus article "A commencement address for whom?"

*I thought Middlebury was done promoting eugenics!

- ◯ Yes, this choice aligns with the college's mission statement
- ◯ No, this choice does not align with the college's mission statement
- ◯ Prefer not to respond

Do you think the college should maintain the president's unilateral decision-making power over the choice of commencement speaker? *

See this article for more information.

- ◯ Yes, the president should choose the commencement speaker
- ◯ No, the college should adopt a more participatory system
- ◯ Prefer not to respond

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kmbuerge@gmail.com Switch account

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Seniors' support for the faculty/staff petition and faculty motion

"In a plenary faculty meeting on Friday, April 18, 94% of the nearly 200 faculty members in attendance voted to pass a motion demanding that the administration and Board of Trustees reverse the recently announced compensation cuts for employees and enrollment increase." (The Campus, April 24th)

Subsequently, a petition was published by members of the college faculty (the "Econ 12") to reject the changes made to benefits. If you have not signed their petition, you can do so here.

To access information about their demands, view their website here.

We seniors are supporters of their petition and faculty motion and are not connected to any faculty or staff organizing. These questions are separate from the Econ 12 petition.

Petition in support of faculty and staff

Do you believe that the administration and Board of Trustees should reverse their decision to cut faculty and staff benefits (including health insurance plans and retirement benefits)? *

Reminder: The 4% cut to a benefit plan equates to losing an average of 2–3 years' worth of their annual salary (as shared during faculty walk-out). The Board of Trustees has officially affirmed these cuts as of the week of 5/12.

- ○ Yes, I believe the administration and Board of Trustees should reverse these benefits cuts
- ○ No, I do not believe the administration and Board of Trustees should reverse these benefits cuts
- ○ Prefer not to respond

Do you believe that the administration's threats of layoffs, forced early retirements, and benefits cuts harm the faculty/staff in a way that degrades the quality of a liberal arts education? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Prefer not to respond

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Not shared

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Part 3: ACTION REQUESTS

A group of seniors is planning to display dissent at graduation. We are polling you, our class, to determine how many will join us. Choosing "yes" on this question does not bind you to following through, but please answer honestly.

If you will not be attending graduation, please choose 'I will not be attending graduation' for this question.

We do NOT intend to undermine our student speaker, B Striker. Any and all actions will be focused on the choices of the administration and/or their chosen commencement speaker, not the student speaker.

To...

a) show support for the faculty and staff motions
b) protest the unilateral decision-making power given to administration regarding the commencement speaker
c) protest "Middlebury's choice of an investment executive as a role model for its graduates"

We are planning on doing one of the below actions. The decision will be made based on the results of the below question.
One: Students are planning to stand and turn our backs during President Snyder's AND Chuck Davis's speeches.

Two: Students are planning to walk out during President Snyder's AND Chuck Davis's speeches. **We will support and listen to B Striker's speech and return to walk and receive our diplomas and celebrate our Honorary Degree Recipients and Tenured Professors.**

Many faculty, including the AAUP, support both of these actions.

We will decide which action to move forward with based on the results of this question. *

Which would you do?

- [ ] I would stand and turn my back during these speeches
- [ ] I would walk out during these speeches (and return to accept my diploma)
- [ ] I will not do either, but I DO support
- [ ] I will not do either, I do NOT support
- [ ] Prefer not to answer
- [ ] I will not be attending graduation
- [ ] Other:

Other Potential Actions

The ABOVE actions are explicitly and only linked to benefit cuts and graduation speaker issues.
The BELOW potential actions allow for, although do not necessitate, students to make connections to larger issues in the demonstration of their dissent.

The infringement on speaker selection is connected to the broader erosion of democracy in this country. The culture of distrust sewn between the college and its employees by these budget cuts makes the learning environment of our college drastically more vulnerable to the federal government's ongoing attacks against higher education. Your fellow students and graduates across the country are already facing disciplinary and legal actions for exercising their right to free speech on issues like Gaza, immigration, and other recent government policies.

The following are other POTENTIAL actions. Please answer with the understanding that if we do them, many other people will also be participating.

Would you participate in a call and response action during graduation? *

Examples of phrases: "Support faculty/staff," "No layoffs," "Defend Middlebury," "Middlebury is a college, not an investment portfolio," "Disclose. Divest."

- ◯ Yes, I would participate in a call and response chant
- ◯ No, but I DO support this
- ◯ No, I do NOT support this

Would you participate in collectively singing a song as a form of protest during graduation proceedings? *

- ◯ Yes, I would sing along
- ◯ No, but DO support this
- ◯ No, I do NOT support this

Would you hold up a sign while you walk the stage that speaks to the issues referenced in this survey? (you will have the ability to select the text of your sign. Specifics to come based on responses) *

- ◯ Yes, I will hold up a sign while I walk the stage
- ◯ No, but I DO support this
- ◯ No, I do NOT support this

Would you wear/carry a symbol of solidarity and resistance as you walk across the stage during graduation?

- ☐ Yes, a keffiyeh
- ☐ Yes, a full-sized Palestinian Flag
- ☐ Yes, a hand-held Palestinian Flag
- ☐ Yes, a pride flag
- ☐ Yes, a sign indicating support of faculty and staff
- ☐ Yes, a different symbol of solidarity/resistance
- ☐ No, but I DO support at least one of above
- ☐ No, I do NOT support this
- ☐ Other:

Would you hand Interim President Steve Snyder (or a fellow administrator) one of the below items when shaking their hand on stage?

- [ ] Yes, a hand-held Palestinian flag
- [ ] Yes, a pamphlet distributed at graduation containing the results of the the first two pages of the survey
- [ ] No, but I DO support at least one of the above
- [ ] No, I do NOT support this
- [ ] Other:

Would you ask your family members/supporters in the crowd to participate in any of the actions listed above?

- [ ] Yes, turning around for the commencement speaker
- [ ] Yes, turning around for the president's speech
- [ ] Yes, call and response
- [ ] Yes, abstaining from clapping after the President or commencement speaker
- [ ] Yes, holding signs, pins, etc
- [ ] No, I would not ask my people to be involved in any way

Do you have any suggestions? What would you like to see at graduation?

Your answer

Do you have any concerns / questions?

Your answer

Reminder: please add your email if you'd like us to send an update with the results of the survey and/or if you'd like to participate in the potential actions from above.

Your answer

If you would like to participate in organizing any of the above actions, please include your name and phone number below. We'll contact you ASAP :)

Your answer

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